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AUTHOR Krieger, George W.
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ABSTRACT

The study describes the use of a model and reinforcement counseling approach, and a control approach, with fifty-six educable retarded youngsters. The treatment approach increased information seeking behavior of the subjects. The results were discussed in terms of the use of modeling, reinforcement counseling and other techniques for improving vocational services to the retarded. (Author)

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**AN APPROACH TO VOCATIONAL COUNSELING
WITH THE RETARDED**

**George W. Krieger
Assistant Director
Rehabilitation Counselor Education
University of Maryland
College Park, Maryland 20742**

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Abstract

An approach to vocational counseling with the retarded was studied. The study describes the use of a model and reinforcement counseling approach, and a control approach, with fifty-six educable retarded youngsters. The treatment approach increased information seeking behavior of the subjects. The results were discussed in terms of the use of modeling, reinforcement counseling and other techniques for improving vocational services to the retarded.

AN APPROACH TO VOCATIONAL COUNSELING WITH THE RETARDED

George W. Krieger

University of Maryland

The mentally retarded are much in need of improved vocational counseling services. It is becoming evident that the retarded can benefit from both work adjustment and work training programs. Many retarded youngsters can earn high school diplomas through work-study program. (Kolstoe & Frey, 1965; Warren, 1965) These programs need to expand their vocational counseling services. Counselors need to know what youngsters can be helped by what techniques, with what goals in mind.

The use of occupational information has long been basic in vocational counseling. Some recent studies have investigated this variable as it is used with the retarded. (Fudell, 1963; Plotkin, 1966). However, no systematic procedures have been developed to aid counselors who work with the retarded. Recent research on the non-retarded seems to provide a fresh direction in this regard. Krumboltz and Thoreson (1964) have shown that behavioral techniques can add much to the counseling process. They specifically have shown that a model plus reinforcement counseling treatment can increase information seeking behaviors of high school students.

The purpose of this study was to investigate the use of modeling and reinforcement with the educable retarded. The specific hypothesis studied was that a model and reinforcement counseling treatment would be

more effective than a generalized control procedure in the promotion of information seeking behaviors.

METHOD

Subjects

Fifty-six male students in a high school program for the retarded were randomly assigned to one of four groups. The groups were: experimental-senior, experimental-junior, control-senior, and control-junior. The age range of the subjects was 16-18. Their IQ range was 60-85.

Treatment

The treatment group received two half hour model plus reinforcement counseling sessions. The model tape, a simulated vocational counseling session was presented to each subject. The student model was described as similar to the subject. The student model was alert, interested and interacted freely with the counselor model.

In the reinforcement procedure the counselor verbally praised the client for certain statements. Statements reinforced referred to vocational planning, vocational interests and occupational information. Counselors showed enthusiasm and interest and tried to be generally reinforcing.

In the control session the counselor and student held a half hour general interview. Topics usually centered around school work and jobs, but no model tape or specific reinforcement was provided.

The counselors, all volunteers were graduate students in counseling. They received pre-training in the appropriate procedures and practiced the procedures through role playing. Since some counselors met only with experimental subjects and others only with controls, an attempt was made to assign counselors as to skill and experience equally to both experimental and control groups.

Criterion Variables

Three criterion variables were used.

1. Vocational Planning Strategies (VPS) - A VPS refers to the subject's expression of knowledge of how to go about getting occupational information. Each client was presented with three job situations and was asked to tell the interviewer as many ways of finding out about the job as he could. Each appropriate response was counted as one strategy.

2. Vocational Planning Behaviors (VPB) - A VPB refers to an action of the subject with the intention of finding out about a job. Two specific types of VPB were made available for the subjects. First, a pre-addressed post-card was given to each subject. He could receive occupational information by filling out the back of the card and mailing it to the experimenter. Secondly, a "Handbook on Job Facts" was placed in the school. Subjects were permitted to read the book at their leisure. They were asked to sign the book when they used it. Receipt of the postcard and the signature on the book were both counted as VPB. Other VPB's are discussions with parents, visits to job sites and other relevant activities.

3. Vocational Interest Measure (VI) - The VI consisted of a list of 35 jobs. The jobs were familiar to the subjects. Each job was rated by the subject on the basis of how interested he was in finding out about that job. The total score i.e., ratings from 1 - 5 on 35 jobs was used as an indicator of the general interest level of the subjects.

Procedures

The treatment was administered during a two week period. Criterion information was collected during the third week. Each treatment and control session was conducted individually. For the experimental groups the model tape was presented during the first and last two minutes of the half hour session. Each of the subjects met twice with his counselor.

RESULTS

The data was analyzed using a 2 x 2 analysis of variance design with counseling treatment and grade level (junior or senior) as independent variables. The significance level was set at .05.

In Table 1 the means and standard deviations for the experimental and control groups are presented. The treatment group did show higher scores on the variables of VPS and VPB. The treatment did lead to an increase in ISB. The treatment group did not score higher on the VI measure.

Table 1 about here.

The means and standard deviations for seniors and juniors were also analyzed. No differences were found on any of the three criterion variables for the two groups.

DISCUSSION

The results have implications for the counseling of the retarded. Behavioral methods can be effective with educable mentally retarded youngsters. In this case a model plus reinforcement counseling treatment led to an increase in information seeking behaviors of the students. The study presented here can serve as stimulus to detailed study of other systematic vocational counseling procedures with the retarded. These procedures can add to the student's exploration of jobs and should help him in the making of an appropriate occupational choice.

Further research follow-up is needed. Modeling techniques have been shown to be effective in a number of counseling situations. Bandura, (1969) Kliebhan (1967) has shown the effectiveness of modeling in a workshop setting for the retarded. Counselors can develop modeling procedures and integrate them into the counseling process.

Reinforcement techniques have also been shown to be effective in a number of counseling situations. (Kumboltz and Thoreson, 1969). Counselors should learn what reinforcers applied in what way can be effective with their clients.

No difference was found in the VI measure between the two groups. The importance of this variable is underscored, however, by the recent attempt to design interest inventories specifically for the retarded (Burg & Barrett, 1967; Parnicky, Kahn, Burdette, 1965). The early introduction of vocational interest material should stimulate the retarded youngster to further job exploration.

No differences were found between juniors and seniors in this study. However, vocational development theory does indicate that youngsters move through different stages in their vocational development (Osopow, 1968). Counselors need to be sensitive to the level of the student's readiness to take part in vocational counseling. Different approaches may be applicable to students at different levels.

The research reported here is of a pilot nature. It leaves many questions unanswered but does suggest an approach for counselors to take. Vocational counseling with the retarded is an important task. The use of specific techniques and behavioral measures may aid the counselor to provide better vocational services to the mentally retarded. The development of these approaches is essential if counselors are truly to serve the needs of their clients.

Table 1

Means and Standard Deviations for the
Experimental and Control Groups on the
Criterion Variables

	Vocational Planning Strategies *		Vocational Planning Behaviors *		Vocational Interest	
	M.	S.D.	M.	S.D.	M.	S.D.
Experimental	8.64	3.27	3.96	3.13	85.75	19.63
Control	6.39	3.12	1.64	1.35	88.04	20.75

* = "p" is significant $< .05$

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